DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 331 116 EA 022 698

AUTHOR Keedy, John L.; Finch, Aubrey M.
TITLE Implementing a Shared Decision-Making Structure: A Case Study.
PUB DATE Nov 90
NOTE 47p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration (Atlanta, GA, November 11-13, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Role; Case Studies; Educational Environment; *Educational Improvement; High Schools; *Leadership Styles; *Participative Decision Making; *Principals; School Based Management; *School Effectiveness; Teacher Administrator Relationship; Teacher Attitudes
IDENTIFIERS *Georgia

ABSTRACT

Ways in which a high school principal implemented a shared decision-making structure into his school are described in this case study. Two research questions are explored: the identification of the principal's school improvement agenda; and how he improved his school. Methodology involved interviews with the principal and teachers, as well as administration of a school norm checklist to teachers. The survey response rate for all four case studies was 91 percent. The principal's perceptions of his school improvement strategies were characterized by two themes: judicious decision making; and gradual implementation of teacher participation in decision making. Teachers' perceptions of their principal's strategies were congruent with his stated agenda in the following areas: high standards for students and teachers; an emphasis on instructional time; shared decision making; and professional development. Three tables and two figures are included. (24 references) (LMI)

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IMPLEMENTING A SHARED DECISION-MAKING STRUCTURE:

A CASE STUDY

John L. Keedy, Ed.D.
assistant professor
School of Education
West Georgia College
Carrollton, GA 30118-0001
404/836-6557

Aubrey M. Finch
principal
Oglethorpe County High School
Rt. 1, Box 1060
Oglethorpe, GA 30648
404/743-8124

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

paper presented at the annual conference of the
Southern Regional Council on Educational Administration
Atlanta, Georgia, November 13, 1990

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Introduction

Schooling in our country must change for our students to achieve at academic levels comparable to those of our global competitors. Over the past five years public pressure for site-based management and shared decision-making (SDM) has now been packaged into the illusive term "school restructuring". The bureaucratic model of school organization, in which instructional policies are developed at state and district levels, translated into rules and regimens by administrators, and implemented by teachers, must be replaced by a professional model (Darling-Hammond, 1987). Yet the current climate in education does not support the development of instructional leaders from within the ranks of teachers (Rallis, 1988). How do we go about changing over one-hundred years of schooling?

In this paper, a case study is used to describe how a high school principal, Aubrey Finch, implemented a SDM structure into his school, Oglethorpe County High School (OCHS), Georgia. Finch was one of four principals studied under a Teacher Regional Center Grant, funded by the Board of Regents, University System of Georgia: School Improvement Practices of Successful High School Principals. The methodology section (which follows) was used in the four-principal study. In this paper the authors briefly describe findings from the first research question and then use the second question findings to describe the SDM implementation process.

Methodology

The two research questions were:

(1) **What Are the School Improvement Agendas of these Principals?**

(2) **How Did These Principals Improve Their Schools?**

Procedure for Identifying Successful High Schools

(1) A pool of successful principals was identified through the nomination technique. The researcher called Regional Educational Service Agencies (RESA) directors, superintendents, professors of educational leadership, and other officials. The two criteria for the nomination process were: 1) these principals had gained a reputation for "turning a school around" during their tenures; and 2) following this phase, student outcomes improved significantly.

(2) Final selection of the four principals (including this principal) used these variables:

a) a long term (at least three years) increase in student achievement as measured by standardized tests;

b) selection as a member of the National Schools of Excellence (U.S. Department of Education) or a member of the Georgia Schools for Excellence;

c) decrease in high school dropout rate;

d) decrease in suspension and/or expulsion rate;

e) decrease in student retention rates;

g) increase in rate of students accepted to post-secondary education;

h) increase in employment rates of graduates;

i) the current principal has been there at least three years;

(3) See Table 1 for the OCHS student improvement data.

Research Design

The research design essentially consisted of an interpretive case study as field investigation (Erickson, 1986). According to the four perspectives (below), the research design was a quantitative-qualitative "mix" dependent on the "function of method" (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 22).

Yin (1984) defined the case study as an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon in real-life context, when boundaries between phenomenon and context were not clearly evident, and when multiple sources of evidence were used. Because the questions were focused clearly before the study and grounded in the literature, this study may be more "empirical" (which could, according to Yin, 1984 be either qualitative or quantitative). From a second perspective, the design was partly qualitative because no prior commitment to a theoretical model was made, even though little direct observation was made (Van Maanen, Dabbs, & Faulkner, 1982).

From a third perspective, this study was interpretivist Individuals construct their own social reality, rather than having reality always be the determiner of individual's perceptions -- as opposed to the objective quantitative research (Gage, 1989). Finally, this design had an ethnographic element: In using interactionism from the field of sociology, this study

Table 1

Moore County High School: Student Achievement Data

Data Description	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989
State Criterion-based tests in: reading	80%	97%	97%	95%	90%	87%
math	67%	96%	95%	91%	81%	85%
writing*			309	335	342	347
					84%	91%
School dropout rates (source: Georgia Department of Education)			12%	9%	6%	6%
Goal: ensure that 60% of dropouts return or secure employment				69%	75%	
Choice and Challenge School: total enrollment / dropouts n=18						11%
other "at-risk" students: total enrollment / dropouts n=27						27%

*expressed in mean scores

investigated norms relating to social interaction as a method of "negotiating meanings in context" (Anderson, 1989) -- i.e., through studying school-based norms and principal-teacher interactions.

This study also combined the descriptive and interpretive case study designs (Merriam, 1988). Question 1 was essentially descriptive: Interview data were used to describe the school improvement agendas of four principals. Question 2 was interpretive: Data from three sources were compared and contrasted for meaning and consistency. Weber (1971) described the case study approach as going to a few schools and observing appropriate behavior. The clinical, in-depth approach replaces the statistical approach. Identification of a few sets of behaviors supported by the literature replaces the quantitative design (teacher-student ratio, number of library books per student, etc.).

Very little is known about specifically what principals in successful high schools do (i.e., are they instructional leaders or efficiency managers?). Campbell and Stanley (1963, p.6) defined the one-shot, exploratory case study as a "single group studied only once, subsequent to some agent or treatment presumed to cause change." Based on the literature on the principalship and school improvement, the researcher assumed that use of the interview (Spradley, 1979) and "thick description" (Fetterman, 1980) could identify school improvement agendas, strategies, and school-based norms in successful high schools. As naturalistic inquiry, this study proposed to establish plausibility (that

principals in successful high schools make major contributions to their schools' success) without establishing causality (Campbell, 1978).

Internal validity in empirical case studies is closely associated with reliability. Reliability means consistency among data sources. This consistency can be used to posit a form of internal validity -- not in causal terms (a term germane to objective quantitative research -- but in "truth value" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). External validity relates to this study's "transferability" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985): Engaging in comparative understanding beyond the immediate circumstances of a local setting (Erickson, 1986).

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection occurred for three days at OCHS. Procedures for each research question follow.

Research Question #1

Each principal was interviewed three times (on the mornings of Days 1 and 2 and on the afternoon of Day 2). The three interview topics, respectively, were: 1) principal's **mission**; 2) **school context** ; and 3) principal's **vision**. When combined, three topics comprise each principal's **school improvement agenda** (SIA).

Research Question #2

Three data sets comprise this question: the principal's strategies, teacher perceptions of their principal's school improvement contributions, and social norms claimed by

interviewees to define principal-teacher relationships.

Principals' Strategies. The principal was asked the open-ended question: What strategies did you use to improve your school? The interviewer and principal discussed the most appropriate framework within which to relate these strategies. (The principal chose the chronological framework.) The interviewer recorded these strategies with two interviews (the afternoon of Day 2, and the morning of Day 3).

Teacher Perceptions of Their Principal's SI Contributions. Ten teachers were interviewed using the following protocol steps

a) The interviewer first explained the study's parameters: Using this construct [Principals tend to affect teachers who affect students (Clark, Lottto, & McCarthy, 1979)], this research was concerned only with the relationships between principals and teachers. Then the open-ended questions (Patton, 1990) were used:

b) "How has this school improved?"

c) "How was your principal involved in this improvement/"

d) "Can you describe a specific example of **how** s/he went about contributing to the implementation of this improvement?"

e) For this protocol steps (a) through (d) were repeated until the interviewee could no longer specify school improvement efforts contributed by the principal.

Construction of the Norm Checklist. The norm checklist was constructed in the following manner.

a) A list of tentative norms was drawn up and critiqued by each principal and several of the interviewed teachers for their

validity: Did these norms reflect the school improvement expectations between each principal and teachers? This ad hoc committee also culled any phases potentially distracting to teacher respondents from this list.

b) These norms were compiled on a norm checklist, and returned to each school's principal. All teachers were asked to complete these checklists. Teachers were asked to mark "yes" if they perceived that a norm was operating -- regardless of whether they agreed (philosophically) with that norm. They were instructed to leave norms blank **only** if they had a particular circumstance (e.g., being a new teacher to school, or physical isolation; a few teachers were located in separate buildings and occasionally lacked a vantage point to make judgments). The checklist return rate for OCHS was 91%.

Study Analysis

Erickson's "triangulation of the data" (1986) was used in comparing and contrasting the several data sources (See Figure 1 for the research paradigm). Interview data were tape-recorded, transcribed into the computer, and analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted to find "linkages" and "generalizations of patterns" among the data sources (Erickson, pp. 150-151).

Research Question #1

Data defining the three topics of school context, principal's mission, and principal's vision were analyzed, synthesized, and interpreted into the school improvement agenda (SIA). Were data from the three sets consistent? How did each principal's Mission affect his/her Vision? How was the Vision affected by school context?

Research Question #2

SI practices were based on the preponderance of the evidence among the three data sources of the principals' narrative of SI strategies, SI contributions identified by teachers, and agreed-on norms relating to both of these sources. SI "practices" were interpreted as the interrelationship (or common agreement) among these three sets of data. The principals' narrative accounts of SI strategies were analyzed for emerging themes. How did each principal implement the SIA into strategies for school improvement?

The strategies were compared and contrasted for corroboration with the perceptions of SI improvements by teachers with whom they worked to improve their schools. (Hence on the research paradigm these two data sources were placed on corners of an inverted triangle.) The teacher perceptions on their principals' SIs were categorized by common characteristics (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Spradley, 1979; Patton, 1990) and by content analysis (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Holsti, 1969). A panel of experts (four professors in education administration) was used to generate inter-rater reliability estimates for the four sets of categories (representing the four principals). How accurately did they

replicate the categorization of SI practices into the categories inducted by the researcher? The inter-reliability estimate for OCHS was 81%.

The prevalent categories (those having both the greatest percent of the ten interviewed teachers and the greatest total number of items) were compared with themes of the principals' strategies. Was there a logical cohesion between these two data sets?

Norms perceived as occurring by more than 70 per cent of the teachers (Foskett, 1967; Keedy, 1982; Newcombe, 1950) were interpreted as existing in that school. The checklist was analyzed for reliability: the extent to which responses may be influenced by extraneous factors (e.g., the time day respondents filled out checklist). The reliability coefficient alphas was .81. Norms were compared to the principals' strategies and the prevalent categories of SI improvements. In defining SI practices, these three data sets were "interactional" (Erickson, 1986, p.). Since norms define both roles (Jackson, 1966) and behavioral expectations (Homans, 1955), agreed-on norms were expected to confirm both the principals' SI strategies and SI improvements. (School norms represent the "bottom" of the triangle on Figure 1.)

Although collected through teacher and principal interview, norms were considered operating that passed a research-based "cutoff" score of 70 percent (Foskett, 1967; Keedy, 1982). Norms were identified and analyzed to determine what norms characterized the principal-teacher expectations (as a product of the school improvement process).

Finch's Mission, Vision, and OCHS Contextual Factors

Finch's first year (1983-84) was an extension of his leadership style from his previous position as principal. The OCHS superintendent hired him to bring law and order back to OCHS -- as he had done at his previous high school. This new position fit Finch's mission: to help shape a school. He used administrative fiat to bring the school under control (e.g., he assigned teachers' duties for corridors and parking lots, and he increased the instructional time).

After the school had a safe, orderly environment, Finch mused, "Now what? Will I be here for the rest of my life? Can I rule by administrative fiat forever?" He realized that he had to involve his very bright, competent teachers in shaping a school in which they wanted to teach. Through exchanging ideas, people exhibited a willingness to solve school problems because important issues were out in the open. He then started to develop a vision of a SDM model at OCHS where teachers would be encouraged to confront each other on crucial, school-wide issues. With a structure implementing his vision in place, Finch reasoned that he would not have to expend energy fighting turf issues and defending his administrative positions: Teachers and administrators would both be responsible for decision-making. By establishing a set SDM procedure, all issues could be accommodated under the same framework.

There were some advantages conducive to Finch's mission and

vision related to school context. Because this was a rural community, where the expectation was to obey one's teacher, teachers generally could teach at OCHS and not spend half the class time disciplining their students. Because OCHS was close to a university town, many of the teachers were open to innovations. The resources of the university were accessible. The principal had considerable autonomy from the superintendent (which he had negotiated before he took the position), and he had been hiring some new, very competent teachers. Finally, the socioeconomic status had been changing in this county, and there were more professional people moving into the county with higher expectations for student achievement.

Having conceptualized a rough plan for shared decision-making, Principal Finch then shopped around for the right resources and found a university professor with whom he could collaborate to establish a gameplan.

Physical Plant

The 30-year old school building was only average in physical appearance. It had a brick facade and consisted of a single story with a cafeteria and gymnasium. The vocational department was housed in a separate building. Despite its age, the interior of the building was reasonably clean. Work had begun to facelift the building exterior.

Demographics of Student Population

The student population for 1989-90 was 72% white and 28% black. Seven years ago the student population had been 35% black. There were no subsidized housing projects in Oglethorpe County;

many blacks moved to a nearby city for work. In addition, some white professionals were beginning to move to Oglethorpe County. Politically, the effect of this professional class was just beginning to be felt at the high school. For instance, the principal occasionally received calls inquiring about additional course offerings, such as a second language. 24% of the students attended college and approximately 16% to 20% attended additional training schools after graduation from high school.

Teaching Staff

There were 28 full-time teachers and four part-time teachers at OCHS. The teacher turnover was small. Most turnover was caused by the relocation of spouses, although occasionally a few teachers had been encouraged to leave. Oglethorpe County was an attractive place to teach. The county was 18 miles from Athens, where most teachers enjoyed the university-town atmosphere. Teachers enjoyed teaching in Oglethorpe County because rural community values, such as respect for teachers (e.g., "We still want our children to behave") resulted in teachers being able to teach. At one local breakfast place, the researcher overheard a high school student complaining that one of his teachers had never liked him. The men at his table had retorted: "Keep your mouth shut and you'll do better."

Because of the geographical position of Oglethorpe County, Finch had some flexibility in choosing teachers. Traditionally, the board had wanted to get teachers from within: In most rural counties school boards have been a major employer. Finch occasionally bucked the board, however, because he wanted to get the best possible candidates to teach at OCHS. Having most

teachers live outside the county was a tradeoff. These teachers could not be public relations representatives for the school (e.g., by attending home football games). By not living in the county, however, they could make hard and fast decisions about grading students and not have to worry about giving the next door neighbor's son a lower-than-expected grade.

Community

Two or three years ago there had been a bond issue to renovate the school. This bond issue failed by approximately a three to one vote. Folks wanted to have a good education, but they did not want it to cost money and raise taxes. Farmers often made their opinions known that the superintendent and the high school principal were paid too much. Money, in their opinion, should be used to repair roads. Recently, the fiscal situation had improved. The OCHS gymnasium bond had been paid off, and the school was currently using accumulated capital outlay monies to renovate the school cosmetically, (i.e., painting, new gutters, downspouts, etc.).

Improvement in Student Outcomes

OCHS, in 1984, set a long term goal to improve student achievement as measured by the passing of the state-required, tenth grade achievement test. (This test had to be passed as a requirement for graduation.) In 1983, 80% of students passed the reading test and 67% passed the mathematics test. (See Table 1.) In 1989, 87% passed reading and 85% passed mathematics. This improvement began in 1984 and continued even though the school significantly decreased its dropout rate over the same period of time, and the state standards were raised in 1985. In 1985, a

state writing sample was added to the requirement. The writing sample mean score (determined by state scores) of students was 309.09 in 1986, 334.69 in 1987, 342.42 and 346.53 in 1988. Acceptable scores changed from slightly over 50% of students in 1985 to over 91% of students in 1988. This was the same time period in which the school reduced its dropout rate in half.

In 1985-86, OCHS set two goals related to high school drop outs. The first was to reduce its overall dropout rate by 40%. The second was to ensure that at least 60% of those who did drop out, would return to an educational setting or secure gainful employment. These goals were achieved by the end of the 1987-88 year. In 1985-86, the school, according to state records, had a 12% annual dropout rate (65 of 517 students). The school developed new programs in instruction, tutoring, advocacy, and mentoring. By 1988, the dropout rate had been reduced by 50%, a 6% annual rate (30 of 453). Records in 1989 showed a maintenance of the overall reduction (33 out of 474). The second goal was achieved in 1988-89; 75% of those who had dropped out the previous year were either in an educational setting or had gainful employment the following year.

OCHS, in 1988, established a new goal related to the dropout rate of entering ninth graders. School personnel developed a profile of previous ninth grade dropouts, and, with the help of the middle school, coordinated a list of likely dropouts. They created a team teaching, school-within-a-school (The Choice and Challenge School). After the first year, two of the original 18 students had dropped out of The Choice and Challenge School, compared to a matched group who stayed in the regular school

program. Of the other ninth graders who were not members of Choice and Challenge (n=27), 27% dropped out. Therefore, after the first year, The Choice and Challenge School had shown greater retaining power than the regular school. In the second year, the school enrolled 40 students (Unpublished research report, 1990).

School Improvement (SI) Practices

The previous section consists of Principal Finch's "inner voice" as he chronicled SI strategies he used to improve OCHS. This section presents a chronology which is then analyzed for strategic themes.

A Chronological Description of Principal Finch's SI Strategies

In 1983-84 (the second year of Finch's tenure) Principal Finch identified six teachers he felt had "publics" (i.e., people who were informal leaders and to whom other teachers gave particularly high credibility). Principal Finch then sounded these people out to see if they were interested in the SDM concept. These were very capable people and represented the informal networking. At a general faculty meeting Finch announced his plan for shared governance and that he had support from these six teachers. At the meeting he admitted an uncertainty about where shared governance might take this school in the future.

In the summer of 1984 the professor agreed to do a workshop specifically on training the staff in the SDM process (e.g., team building, communication skills), and developing an implementation plan. The RESA provided stipends to the participants.

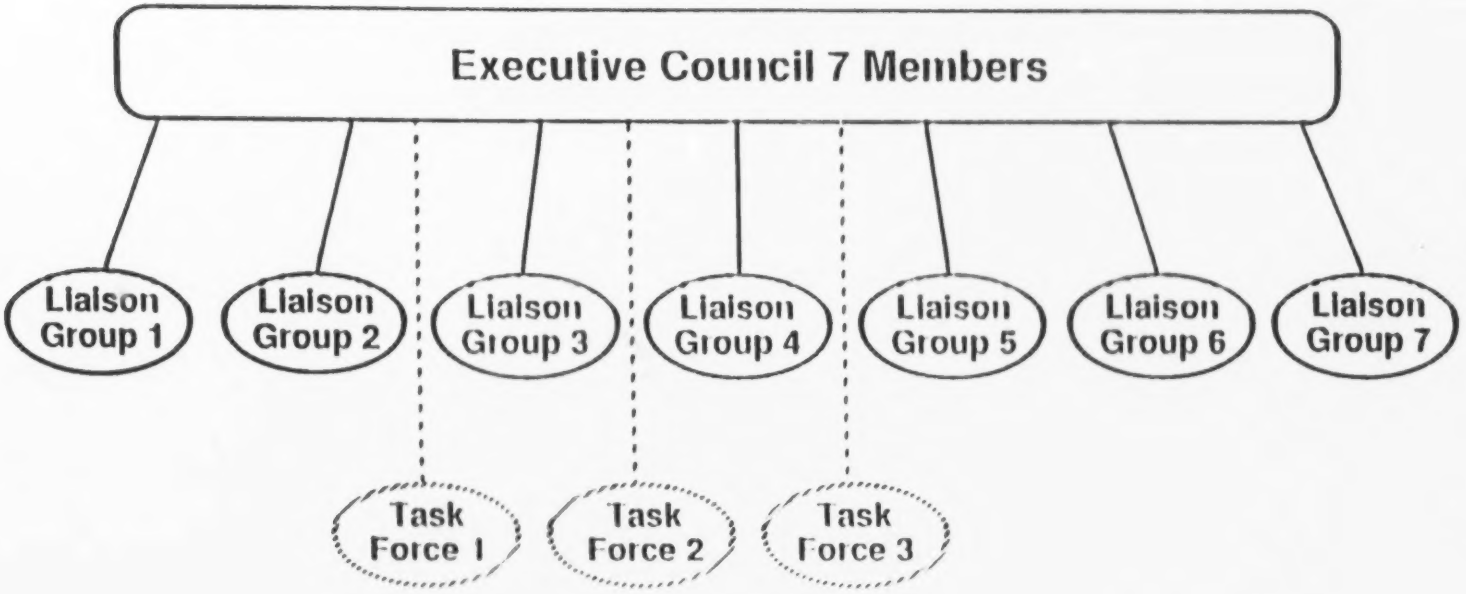
Significantly, 18 of approximately 30 teachers volunteered to participate in this workshop immediately after school closed for the summer without knowing if stipends were actually going to be available from the RESA.

During the workshop, the professor led a brainstorming session in which workshop participants decided to restrict shared governance to matters concerning school-wide improvement of instruction. They decided to stay clear of personal issues, matters normally handled at the department level, and matters involving the elementary and middle schools. They also avoided violations of school board policy. One teacher also suggested that they not get into the daily operations of the school (such as schedules, assignments, and duties). This suggestion was accepted.

These workshop members formed the executive council with Teacher Paul elected chairperson, after being nominated by Finch. The SDM model had an executive council which voted on recommendations but did not make them (Figure 2). Liaison groups were communication links between faculty and the executive council. One executive council member was assigned to each liaison group and served as the liaison group's representative to the council. Task forces were formed after the executive council solicited feedback from all the liaison groups about school-wide instructional needs. The task forces made recommendations which the executive council voted on.

Figure 2.

Organizational Model for Schoolwide Instructional Decision Making



A survey form was distributed for teachers to rank ideas on concerns gained from the workshop. Among the ideas were student academic performance and smoking in the teacher lounge. The latter was chosen as the first school-wide area concern because it had specific parameters. Unlike student performance which could be ongoing and indefinite, the smoking issue was finite and could be resolved. A general faculty meeting was called to discuss the issue of smoking. Procedurally, faculty meetings were the intermediary for the executive council, which ultimately made the decision that a certain concern merited the eventual formation of a task force. A norm then developed of not limiting membership of a task force so as not to kill interest. The risk of this action was the possibility in an unyielding task forces, but there seemed to be no choice in this.

The task force resolved a compromise on smoking: Smoking in the faculty lounge was permitted only during certain times and restricted to the faculty lounge. Several weeks after the task force resolution on smoking was passed by the executive council, several teachers approached Principal Finch concerning the smoking policy to inform him that some teachers were not abiding by the policy set up by the task force: "What are you going to do?" He countered with, "That's not my decision." He then asked the teachers what they were going to do. Finch finally agreed to make a statement that executive council actions were equivalent to what previously were considered administrative directives. The smoking policy was re-posted in 1984-85 and a new reminder was sent out in the fall of 1989. During 1984-85, a positive feeling spread among the teachers. They believed that shared decision-making, could

work.

On the issue of smoking, there were some unhappy people on both sides. Some wanted smoking prohibited, and others who really enjoyed smoking, wanted to be able to come in after a particularly hard class, and light up a cigarette. But the principal had wanted this polarization to occur so that teachers would begin to understand the implications of shared decision-making. He wanted them to realize that things were not all black and white, and that compromises had to be made.

In 1985-86 two group leaders on different task forces individually approached Principal Finch. They expressed frustration because their task forces were not moving. Months went by and nothing had happened. They asked the principal, "What are you going to do?" The principal said, "That's your task force, it's not mine." Principal Finch ruminated, in retrospect, "If I had hopped in, we would have regressed. People would not have taken responsibility for their actions, and they would have always known to come to me with problems with certain task forces."

In 1986-87 a new concern evolved. A large number of overaged students were arriving at the high school unprepared. A task force, called 16+, was convened. This task force continued for two years. Apparently there were too many ramifications for task force members to grab hold of (e.g., How did this student get here? Why was he unprepared? What was wrong with what the middle school teachers were doing? And indirectly, what the elementary school teachers were doing? Were social promotions being used?).

Principal Finch intervened. He approached the dean of the College of Education at the nearby university. The dean said,

"Give me a couple of weeks to reconnoiter, and I'll get back to you." The dean informed Finch that there was considerable interest among the faculty in participating in a program for school improvement. Finch mentioned his idea of forming a joint task force consisting of two subgroups, one short term and one long term. He then wanted to know from the dean, whether these professors would be in for the long haul. If not, "Let's end it now." Reaction was positive and the partnership began. OCHS became the first school to participate in the embryonic Program for School Improvement.

In both the task forces, chairs were from the high school and co-chairs were from the university. During this negotiation the principal approached the task force chairs and said, "I knew we are having problems with this task force on 16+ and I approached the dean of the College of Education. Do you think this was appropriate?" The chairs responded, "Yes, because we are stuck."

The commitment from the professors and the dean of the College of Education may have indirectly led to a big jump in the action in 1986-87. As this partnership was picking up steam, teachers knew they had more resources and they could tackle more problems.

During 1986-87 approximately six to seven task forces were convened. The first was teenage pregnancy. This task force changed its original focus from attempts to affect the incidence of pregnancy to doing service for students once they became pregnant. A second task force was job placement in continuing education.

The student advocate task force was a third task force

formed. Regarding this task force, Principal Finch stated at a state-wide administrative meeting that the Department of Education was part of the problem. Members of this task force had wanted to hire a teacher specifically equipped for dealing with at-risk students, but there was no certification in this area. Apparently Principal Finch's exhortation at this meeting was successful, because he and some of his teachers met with officials from the Department. OCHS became the first high school to gain waiver in the regulation of 50 minute periods.

Other task forces concerned an interdisciplinary approach among three teachers for alternative curriculum and instruction, tutoring, and personal contact. In the personal contact task force, teachers identified their needs in dealing with students and parents. Based on these identified needs a workshop was presented the last week in June. Eighteen teachers met during this workshop without guarantee that there would be stipends available. (Eventually these stipends were paid by staff development funds.) The principal participated in this week-long workshop with the teachers and did not receive a stipend.

In 1987 Principal Finch met with board members and community leaders regarding possibilities for expanding the Choice and Challenge School (i.e., for at-risk students), to off-campus work stations. This was the DCT, which was similar to the distributive education prototype where students work for employees. The work stations concept involved apprenticeships and eventually became course credit. The belief was that learning happened beyond the four walls of the classroom. There was favorable response to this meeting.

In 1988 a new decision was made regarding task forces that were not moving. The decision was made by the executive council to have each task force report on progress every 30 days. This was not the principal's idea, but he supported it as a member of the executive council.

In 1988-89 two new task forces were formed: Duty Schedules and Homeroom Assignments. The nature of these two task forces were antithetical to agreements drawn up in the 1984 workshop that the SDM groups were supposed to deal with structural matters and with school-wide improvement. Finch commented that, "I didn't fight it because I knew it was going to happen; I wanted to stay clear of those task forces because I didn't want to be accused of manipulation." After three or four months each chairman admitted, "We just can't make people happy," and these task forces died. Perhaps at this point a new norm occurred confirming that these were matters that should be dealt with by the principal.

In 1989-90 the dress code concern came up. Most teachers on the executive council believed that a change was needed and some students lobbied with some teachers. Specifically, since the high school did not have air conditioning, many people thought shorts and mini skirts should be allowed. On the executive council, two people were opposed to this new dress code, the principal and one of the teachers. However, the task force recommended, and the executive council approved, these changes to the dress code. Finch knew he had to accept this decision, or the entire SDM structure could be jeopardized. He did make it clear, "I'm not going to measure mini skirt length." The principal ruminated, "I know that the other teachers will bring a student in to me this

spring with a short mini skirt, and I will repeat what I said during the voting and the passing of this revised dress code. It will be up to the teachers to deal with it."

There were three projected task force concerns for 1989-90. The liaison groups were starting to bring up a concern that the principal should begin to screen applicants for teaching positions and hire only nonsmokers. This was related to the problems and the eventual polarization among the staff regarding the smoking policy in the faculty lounge. The principal's position on this was, "I have already stated that I am going to choose the best teacher." A second concern was dealing with student cheating, but the scope, should this become a task force, could get larger and could be expanded to include student lying and appropriate teacher role models.

Third, the currently-convened school community relations task force, thought they might become a standing committee, and should perhaps redefine their task mission. Finch feared that some teachers would use the school community relations committee as a plug for their own programs. "Before long, you have created a monster: Parents do a teacher or two a favor and then push for certain specific programs, such as a new social studies course, etc. Then parents start asking for reciprocal influence which could lead to their intrusion in the classroom. Oglethorpe County (given its proximity to Athens, and a university community, i.e. 18 miles away) was starting to get some parents who could cause this kind of problem."

Emerging Themes In Principal Finch's Strategies During the School Improvement Process

Two themes of the principal's perceptions of the strategies emerge: (1) some judicious decisions made by Finch during this process; and (2) the gradual evolution of teachers taking responsibility for decisions made. The first crucial decision occurred in 1984-85 when Finch supported the executive council smoking policy as equivalent to an administrative directive. Neither the smoking nor non-smoking groups was satisfied with the policy, but once the decision was made, the faculty had to accept it or SDM as a structure would never be accepted. By not interceding with the two floundering task forces in 1985-86, Finch sent the message that task forces were the responsibility of the participating teachers. He did facilitate the collaboration of the neighboring university with these task forces, which then had more resources to draw on. The responsibility for decisions, however, remained with the task forces. Task force members now had a place to go with their problems, and it was not to the principal.

OCHS's success in getting a SEA waiver (1986-87) to offer the at-risk program represented another crucial juncture. Without this waiver the at-risk task force would have have been able to meet the needs of certain OCHS students and the task force members undoubtably would have been dispirited. Finch was OCHS's spokesperson for influencing the SEA to provide this waiver. The 1988 executive council's decision that each task force was to report on progress every thirty days to push task forces along was a landmark decision. This decision was not the principal's idea,

but he did support it as an executive council member.

Two other incidents may have been successful in distinguishing areas appropriate for SDM and those inappropriate: the task forces on duties, schedules, and homework assignments, and the concern percolating through some liaison groups that only non-smoking teachers should be hired. A norm may now have been set that these responsibilities were outside of task force purview.

In 1988-89 the dress code event resulted in more teachers fully participating in SDM. (Up until this event the same eight to ten teachers seemed to be doing most of the work.) Because the principal was outvoted regarding the dress code and did not try to pull principal's rank, there was now little reason for non-participating teachers to remain on the sidelines and remain skeptical about the SDM process.

Principal Finch seemed to have an uncanny knack for gradually giving up the reigns of power, knowing his main gameplayers, and having a vision to look down the road to problems as teachers took a bigger share of both the responsibility and the power in the SDM process. Perhaps this vision helped him make some crucial decisions regarding how far to intervene, when to provide resources, and when to let SDM gameplayers learn from their mistakes. As Finch gradually gave up power to the SDM gameplayers, teachers started making more decisions and were willing to be more responsible for the consequences of those decisions.

Congruency between Finch's Strategies and Teacher SI Perceptions

Table 2 indicates the categorization of teacher perceptions describing how Finch improved OCHS.

These categories were compared with the above analysis of Finch's SI strategies. The congruency between these two sets of data and school norms represented Finch's SI practices. (Appendix A contains SI perceptions of OCHS teachers and is available upon request.)

The categories Student Achievement and Student Discipline represented Finch's managerial phase in getting the school under control as they related to teachers and students, respectively. Standards were set for teachers (e.g., observing teachers, checking lesson plans, protecting instructional time) to ensure that OCHS was going to emphasize student achievement. Standards were also set for students (e.g., student discipline codes, backing of teachers). These two categories were complementary. Given the school's background (before Finch's arrival), improving student achievement was related to implementing consistent standards for student discipline. Student achievement improved when instructional time increased and parents were unable to intervene in unexplained student absences.

The Shared Decision Making and Professional Climate categories reflected Finch's emphasis on teacher development. After he got the school under control, Finch could concentrate on both involving teachers in decision making and encouraging teacher professional development. These two categories may be closely related. As teachers became involved in decisions about school

Table 2

Moore County High School: Teacher Perceptions of Principal School Improvements

Code	Category Descriptions and Examples	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	T*
SDM	The principal intiated **shared decision-making** (i.e., shared governance structure). By participating in this stucture, teachers perceived they could influence the conditions of their workplace.	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	8/8
SA	These improvements were <u>managerial</u> and often mandated (e.g., enforced rules consistently). He observed teachers (before state required it); protected instructional time; when necessary checked lesson plans. Brown indirectly improved **student achievement** by setting higher expectations <u>for teachers</u> as they worked with students. He also demonstrated individual interest in students' well-being and achievement.		x			x x x	x		x x	x	x	6/9
PC	Brown improved the building's professional climate for teachers. He encouraged teacher professional growth by making teachers in SDM and obtaining more material and supplies.		x				x x	x	x		x	5/6
SD	The principal improved **student discipline**. This category was essentially <u>principal-student</u> oriented (e.g., he instituted specific procedures for punishments; communicated this procedure to parents; backed up his teachers in confrontations with parents).		x		x	x			x	x	x	6/6
SBC	He improved the school building and campus grounds. This improvement had a positive effect on teacher morale.		x			x		x				3/3
Abc	*T = totals <u># of respondents (10)</u> total responses											

improvement, they also may have reflected on their own teaching and been receptive to individual growth. The collaboration with the university, the public relations for the different programs that OCHS has participated in, and the principal's continual willingness to buck the community power structure to obtain more materials and equipment for the staff were factors in this process. Finch also was personally involved in the curricula projects for science and the at-risk students. (As one teacher reflected: [Due to Finch's direct involvement in curriculum] "There's more give-and-take among the faculty now.")

Given the school's lack of student discipline and academic emphasis, one might have expected more teacher agreement on the categories Student Achievement and Student Discipline. Some teachers were not at OCHS during Finch's managerial phase (1983-84). Also, many teachers generally expect principals to take charge of their schools and at least discipline students and sometimes teachers, especially in the rural South. (One teacher stated: "If you can't rule the roost, you lose respect".) Third, many teachers are most concerned about their principal's contribution to professional growth for teachers and less interested in improving school building and campus grounds. Whereas the public may be concerned with building appearance, teachers are more concerned about what their principals do for them at the time.

Analysis and Interpretation of Norm Checklist:

Norms identified during teacher interviews were compared with the principal's strategies and the teachers' SI perceptions. The agreement among these three data sources comprise SI practices. Table 3 contains these norms.

Table 3

Norm Checklist for Oglethorpe County High School

This school improvement study (conducted at OCHS January 29-31) is investigating the informal rules of the game ("the way we do things around here") in several high schools. In organizational psychology, they are called norms. Please check each norm not according to whether you agree with it but according to whether you generally expect it to occur during your daily interactions with your colleagues and administrators. If you perceive that a norm generally occurs in your school, check the blank under Y for "yes." If you perceive that a particular norm generally does not occur, check the blank under N for "No." If you have insufficient information (e.g., because you are new to this school) to mark an item "yes" or "No," leave that item blank. Conversely, teachers who have been at this school since your principal began his tenure should know whether practically all of these norms exist or not. Thank you for your assistance in this project.

n	Y	%	N	
34	33	97	01	1. Principal Finch demonstrates direct involvement in instructional improvement projects (e.g., participation week-long "personal contact' workshop and an active colleague in Curriculum Task Force).
31	22	71	09	2. Principal Finch expects and even encourages teachers from different liaison groups to lobby (or "politick") and gain enough support for liaison group leaders (on the Executive Council) to create a Task Force.
31	26	84	05	3. Principal Finch will continue to hire the best instructionally-qualified teachers, even though some teachers have asked him to screen out candidates on the basis of other criteria (e.g. those who smoke).
33	21	64	12	4. It is not mandatory that teachers be actively involved in the liaison groups, nor is it mandatory that teachers volunteer for a Task Force.
33	28	85	05	5. There is built into the shared-governance structure enough opportunities for teacher input. Every teacher is a member of a liaison group. Liaison group members vote annually for liaison group leaders. Any teacher can volunteer to serve on a task force; membership is never restricted, "Therefore it is tough luck if what comes down (i.e., is passed by the Executive Council) you do not like. If you have not put your two cents in, (given the above opportunities) you have no right to complain."

32 31 97 01 6. As more and more Task Forces are perceived as successful (e.g., Choice and Challenge and Student Dress Code), more teachers are becoming involved in Task Forces. Our school is becoming similar to an open market: A person volunteers to serve on a Task Force that he or she is interested in personally. (For instance, one teacher who had never served on a Task Force previously, volunteered for the Increasing Minority Students Entrance to College Task Force).

33 32 97 01 7. Teachers are expected to teach the full 50 minutes. This expectation has been stressed in faculty meetings. In teacher observations the principal sometimes has the opportunity to show teachers where they could use their instructional time more wisely.

33 28 85 05 8. Teachers know that they will be backed by the principal regarding problems with parents.

33 31 94 02 9. Very often topics for liaison groups start with teacher lounge discussion. When someone becomes interested in a particular concern he or she will informally lobby other teachers who are representatives of each of the liaison groups to try to get enough groups to push the issue up to the Executive Council.

34 34 100 00 10. Instructional time is important and is protected here. To protect instructional time we do not have breaks in the morning or excessive time for changing classes, nor do we make excessive use of the public address system. It is more important for the students to be in class and the teachers to be teaching.

33 31 94 02 11. Principal Finch demonstrates a personal concern about the students in the school. He exhibits this concern by standing in the hallway on report card day as students come out, and asking some students to share their report cards. Principal Finch also exhibits this concern for his students by trying to learn the names of all of the students in the school.

30 30 100 00 12. In the Executive Council the one-person, one-vote really operates. (The principal is a member of the Executive Council and is the leader of a liaison group.) When the shared-governance structure first started, the teachers were not sure they could believe this change in governance (because Principal Finch had been rather unilateral in his decision-making during his first year.) But when the Executive Council voted 5-2 to adopt the new dress code as recommended by the Task Force, the principal accepted this decision, even though his was one of the two opposition votes.) This action signaled a change to the teachers because they now knew that Principal Finch would be a gameplayer in this new structure of decision-making.

32 26 81 06 13. With the acceptance of the shared-governance structure, the relationship between Principal Finch and the teachers changed. Teachers go to Principal Finch less for "backing" and more for advice. With more discretion to make decisions comes more responsibility for teachers to accept ramifications for more decisions.

34 32 94 02 14. With the involvement of teachers in the shared-governance structure, teachers feel they have real input into improving their school and shaping their work environment.

34 27 79 07 15. Students for the most part perceive that most decisions are (still) made by Principal Finch -- particularly regarding the new dress code. Students apparently are not aware that the shared-governance structure exists.

This series of five norms approximates the history of teacher-administrative relations from 1983 to the present:

19 08 42 11 16. Previous to 1983-84 there were not high expectations for student achievement and teachers were left to cope on their own in the classrooms.

20 18 90 02 17. In 1983-84 teachers were expected to be very conscientious of how they used instructional time in the classroom and to be task-oriented with the students. Principal Finch observed all teachers and, when appropriate, suggested ways for teachers to improve their use of instructional time.

19 17 89 02 18. When shared decision-making was first implemented there were two groups of teachers: One group of five or six teachers were initially involved in shared-governance and were very supportive of the idea; they were amazed that Principal Finch could be part of shared-governance, when he had been perceived as autocratic (during the first year). The second group of teachers consisted of the majority of teachers who thought that this was just another administrative idea and they simply sat back and watched to see what would come of

23 23 100 00 19. As more and more teachers began to see that things could change, and that the principal was true to his word and did not buck the new policy set up by the Executive Council on the student dress code, more teachers started to see that "I'd better put my two cents in or something that I do not like may work its way through the Executive Council."

25 22 88 03 20. Currently there are mixed feelings about the shared-governance and task force system. There may always be those teachers who prefer the autocratic principal (i.e., teachers with a problem go to principal for his backing) because it is most efficient and they do not want to get involved in the decision-making. There is another group that is very happy with the current system because they have like having input and because they are now becoming major gameplayers in improving the school through task forces.

The norms were interpreted as relating to Principal Finch's management and professional rejuvenation phases (Table 3). The majority of the norms described the SDM structure, which logically relates to professional rejuvenation: As teachers realized they had a real stake in their workplace, they tended to feel more ownership and professional morale might have improved. Of the twenty norms, all but two passed the 70% cut-off.

Management Phase 1

Both the importance of instructional time (Norm 10) and principal's backing parents (Norm 8) received considerable agreement. Norm 7 epitomized the teacher expectation of teaching the full instructional minutes, a goal of Principal Finch's first two years. Norm 17 verified the expectations expressed in Norm 7: Not only were teachers expected to teach the full 50 minutes, but they were expected to use the time well (and not just for busy work). What was odd was the low agreement on Norm 16 (42%). Perhaps, the teachers individually still believed that they had high expectations for students (even prior to and during Finch's management phase), but that the collective school culture did not

mirror the expectations of the individual teachers. Generally, teacher agreement on these norms indicated that some norms defining Finch's management phase (defined in Finch's narrative and specified in teacher-derived SI categories) were still perceived as operating.

Phase 2 - Teacher Involvement in Decision Making

Norm 1 approximated the teacher category of Professional Climate: Finch was perceived as actively participating in instructional improvement projects. Other norms defined the process of teacher acceptance of the SDM structure. Norms 12 and 18 indicated the gradual, general acceptance by the faculty. In the beginning there were few gameplayers, but the dress code incident signaled to teachers that the SDM structure indeed could work (Norm 19). Norms 6, 9 and 14 confirmed that the process was working as more and more teachers realized they could reap benefits through participation in SDM, more teachers were doing so. As Norm 18 implied, as SDM involved more and more teachers, there could be more pressure on the remaining teachers to participate in the process. Otherwise, they would be left out of important decisions. No longer was the process restricted to 5 or 6 teachers. Norm 5 expressed the social cost to teachers if they did not participate. Teacher agreement with Norm 13 was less norm agreement than that of other norms, although it still passed the 70% cutoff. This norm implied that power, defined here as "backing", would be more distributed between principal and teachers. This norm might have received more agreement had the last sentence been excluded since, in effect, it might be asking

two questions (describing two norms and not one).

Norm 4 did not hit the cut-off. There might have been some question about the word, "mandatory". Teacher peer pressure might have been operating. For instance, more teachers were being expected to volunteer for a task force. A second reason might have been the formulation of this norm: two different norms combined in one statement. Teachers might have considered either serving on liaison groups or serving on task forces mandatory but not both.

Two norms confirmed Finch's crucial decisions identified in his strategy narrative. Norm 3 confirmed Finch's decision that personnel (at least teacher hiring) was within his jurisdiction. Norm 19 confirmed a crucial junction (the "dress code incident") during which Finch was true to his word and did not try to undermine the SDM structure.

The teacher SI categorization generally was congruent with the two phases of Finch's strategies: managerial (Student Discipline and Student Achievement) and professional rejuvenation of teachers (Shared Decision Making and Professional Climate). Norm agreement also mirrored Finch's management and rejuvenation phases. Generally high teacher norm agreement indicated that Finch and OCHS teachers shared a school ethos in which the school was both under control (mostly expressed in student expectations) and teachers had a major voice in influencing the quality of their workplace. The norms specified above also confirmed some crucial junctures during which Finch's decision making was crucial in the gradual involvement and commitment of OCHS teachers to SDM.

Case Study Summary: Let's Have

Teachers Influence The Kind of School They Want

Finch's success formula included his ability to change management styles from use of administrative fiat to shared decision-making. He always knew that he wanted to "help shape a school," and that he first would have to get control over OCHS (his mission). Then he realized that long-term school improvement would require sharing the decision-making with his teachers for two reasons. To halve the dropout rate and to continue improving student achievement, he needed to take advantage of the very bright and capable teachers who also needed professional renewal. How could he have the expertise of the classroom teachers who understood the real, daily problems with students and who had better workable solutions? Second, instead of Finch defending his decisions as an administrator, SDM meant that school leaders shared both the decision-making and the responsibility for making those decisions. SDM would take some of the heat off Finch. (And he had taken plenty of this heat in getting the school under control.)

Because his long-term vision was clear, he knew when and how to gradually release control of OCHS. Teachers had to understand how taking responsibility for decisions was often more difficult than making the decisions themselves. Finch became an adroit change facilitator, both because of his sense of administrative timing, and because of the "teacher/coach " in him, as he diplomatically coached the teachers in understanding the repercussions of SDM. His negotiated autonomy from his

superintendent and local board, the proximity to a major university, the small size of the school, and the rural community school (with its traditional values, e.g., respect for teachers) may have facilitated the transition to SDM.

Finch's change in management style was also reflected in how he related with his staff: His role evolved from use of administrative fiat (the effective schools' "strong administrative leadership") to active participant in curriculum design and school improvement workshops. OCHS still appeared to have an orderly and safe environment (established by Finch's administrative fiats). These expectations seemed to still be existent in the (current) SDM phase.. As SDM became accepted by more teachers, Finch had less administration to do and more opportunities for participatory instructional leadership. (Finch had spent a month during the summer of 1990 at a curriculum building workshop.) As several teachers became key gameplayers in negotiating workable non-smoking rules, designing The Choice and Challenge School, changing the dress code, and revising the school-community relationship, Finch became an active participant in instructional improvement programs. Finch then seemed to play two roles: that of symbolic rule enforcer from the administrative fiat era and that of collaborative problem solver within the SDM structure. Finch was later quoted: "I think I, as a principal, had been stupid because I hadn't been using all that brainpower begging to be used. It just doesn't make sense not to involve teachers and students in the decision-making process. I watched myself grow and change, and I feel that the possibilities are timeless with this process" (Program for School Improvement, 1990, p. 14).

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